

Finding Home

BY BARRY MILLER

When in search of the old Miller family cemetery this past weekend, my brother Don, his son Scott, and I came across a patch of periwinkle growing in the woods on the large tract of land in Cotton Grove south of Lexington that includes the cemetery. We stopped, because periwinkle doesn't usually grow that profusely in our area.

Don suspected we might be near the

cemetery where he remembered that periwinkle grows thick and spreading. We were not, in fact, near the cemetery, but as we looked around, I spied a single daffodil in bloom. Daffodils do not grow naturally in the woods. They are always planted. That meant we were on the site of some former habitation, although there were no ruins, no gravestones that we could see. As we looked farther, we saw a few large, flat rocks, perhaps porch stones, if not cornerstones of a house, and some bricks. We had found an old homesite, mostly covered by

decades of leaves and forest, but a homesite all the same with a single daffodil blooming to remember those who had once lived there.

I suspect we had found the homesite of John Broadhorn Miller, who was born in 1757, an 18th-century progenitor of our clan of Millers west of Abbotts Creek in Cotton Grove. One single daffodil to mark the spot where generations of my people lived and loved and flourished. We know where Broadhorn's son Maj. John Miller lived. He built the fine brick home that still stands on the west side of N.C. Highway 8 in Cotton Grove later known as the Everhart place. We know where Maj. John's son Capt. John Henderson Miller lived.

Great-grandfather built the home, with the help of former slaves, after he returned from the Civil War. My grandfather and father were born there. The now white-painted brick home stands to the west of Abbotts Creek on the east side of N.C. Highway 8, directly across from Cotton Grove United Methodist Church, built on land that my grandfather gave for the church in the early 20th century.

How can I be so sure the place is ours? First, the homesite cannot be that far from the family cemetery, although we could not connect the two that day in our walk through the woods. The Miller land holdings ran to the hundreds of acres in those early days, and there is too much gone from the site for it to have been 20th century. My second clue is the periwinkle. It must have been a family favorite for it to have been planted at the cemetery, and it was probably moved from the homesite.

But the main reason I believe is that solitary daffodil. For many years after the family left Cotton Grove in 1943, my mother kept daffodils from there at our home on Banner Avenue in Winston-Salem. They were small, not hybrid, not profuse, but they were part of home for my father, who had died in 1971. I believe that the daffodils she grew were the same as those I saw in the woods, from the same original garden of a grandmother long ago. When I came home that afternoon to our house in Winston-Salem, I looked in the backyard of our home, to the stand of periwinkle which grows there, and I saw in bloom another single daffodil, the only one blooming from bulbs I had brought from my mother's garden on Banner Avenue. One single daffodil to light my way home.

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